the paths of Balkan food biodiversity

Mountain Cheeses

The seasonal migration of livestock has long been practiced in the Balkans. Millions of animals, mostly sheep, were once taken between the Aegean, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Now the last guardians of these ancient traditions are the herders and cheesemakers who still spend the summer making cheese up in the mountains, amidst pristine meadows and breathtaking landscapes.

Help us protect small-scale mountain production!

Albania
Lepushe Mishavin and Çai Malit

1

At 1,250 meters above sea level, Lepushe in the highest village in the Albanian Alps, and indeed in the whole country. Most of the young people have left, but the 70 remaining inhabitants still make cheese, distill raki from plums and produce sauerkraut, potatoes and çai, infusions of wild herbs. They also make mishavin, a cheese spread made by drying out fresh curds. After drying, the curds are crumbled and pressed into wooden barrels. Tlyn, melted clarified butter mixed with cornmeal, is poured into the barrels, and the cheese then ages for a minimum of two months. Çai malit is the local name for mountain tea, made from herbs collected in the summer while they are in flower. There are two types: the real cai, or mountain oregano, and green cai, a type of St. John's wort that only grows at high altitudes. They are dried in the shade and brewed into tea throughout the year. The infusions are considered a panacea against all winter ills, especially when sweetened with wild-harvested honey.

Production area Lepushe village, Kelmend
Coordinator Gjystina Gvrishaj
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Bosnia-Herzegovina
Cheese in a Sack

2

Sir iz Mijeha (cheese in a sack) is a very unusual type of cheese made from raw sheep's, cow's and goat's milk or a combination of the three, and aged inside a sheepskin for two to twelve months. The size of the finished product depends on the size of the sheep whose skin is used, and can range from 30 to 70 kg.

The Presidium established an association of producers who adopted a production protocol in order to obtain a recognizable, high-quality product. Its aims include the preservation of three native breeds, the Pramenka sheep and Gatacka and Busa cows.

Production area Ljubinje, Prozor-Rama, Konjic, Ljubuški, Nevesinje and Berkoviši Villages in Herzegovina
Coordinator Miroslav Glogovac
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miroslav@okusihercegovinu.ba

Bulgaria
Karakachan Sheep

3

In the past the Karakachan sheep breed (which takes its name from an ancient Balkan ethnic group) was common throughout Bulgaria. At the beginning of the 20th century there were 500,000 animals but by the end of the 1950s their numbers had reduced to 150,000, and by 2007 only 400 had survived. The sheep is small in size with a long, thick coat whose color changes with age from black to brown and finally to gray. Its excellent high-fat milk is used to produce Sirene, a white brined cheese similar to feta, and an extraordinary yogurt.

Production area Vlahi, Pirin Mountains, Blagoevgrad province, southwestern Bulgaria
Coordinator Sider Sedefchev
tel. +359 886839137 – bbps.semperviva@gmail.com

Bulgaria
Tcherni Vit Green Cheese

4

Sirene is a traditional white sheep's milk cheese similar to feta and common throughout the Balkans, but near the village of Tcherni Vit, it is prepared in an unusual way. Here, shepherds place the cheese in small wooden barrels and age it in cellars. Contact with the wood, the slow evaporation of the brine and the microclimate in the narrow valley of Tcherni Vit all contribute to the formation of molds that turn the cheese green and give it a strong and piquant flavor.

Production area Tcherni Vit village, Teteven municipality, Lovech district, Balkan Range
Coordinator Tsvetan Dimitrov
tel. +359 889521027 – kmetstvo_cherni_vit@abv.bg

Tcherni Vit Earth Market

The first Bulgarian Earth Market was started in the small mountain town of Tcherni Vit. The wooden structure that covers the market was designed to be a multi-purpose community meeting place, and it regularly hosts taste education initiatives for children and adults. The structure also houses a shop, which is open every day. Every weekend, 15 producers selected by the Slow Food Teteven Convivium take part in the market, selling only their own produce.

Croatia
Škripavac cheese producers

5

Škripavac is a fresh, soft cheese made of raw milk whose name is a variation of the Croatian word for "squeaky," because when chewing on the fresh škripavac cheese it makes a distinct sound. Škripavac is made with milk from the Busha (Buša) cow, a small, hearty indigenous breed of cattle, which produces a high quality milk with a high percentage of fat. To date, there is only one young producer who, with courage, is still breeding this ancestral breed and producing this unique cheese.

Production area Dalmatinska Zagora e Lika
Coordinator Ivo Kara-Pesic
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Macedonia
Mavrovo Reka Mountain Pasture Cheeses

6

In Mavrovo Park, kashkaval, possibly the ancestor of all stretched cheese, is still produced. It looks like a pecorino, a 4-5 kg round, aged for a long period in cool, damp rooms and obtained through a complex technique. Apart from kashkaval, the Presidium was also created to safeguard other products of this ancestral sheep-breeding tradition: belo sirenje (similar to Greek feta cheese) and kiselo mleko (literally "sour milk," similar to a thick and creamy yoghurt). All of these cheeses are made from the raw milk of local sharplaninska sheep, named after the mountains of this park.

Production area Mavrovo National Park, Mavrovo and Rostuša municipalities, Shar Planina massif.
Coordinator Nikolce Nikolovski
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Romania
Bucegi Mountains Branza de Burduf

7

Branza de Burduf, the most prized among Romanian cheeses, is produced by processing Caş, another sheep milk cheese (sometimes made with added cow milk) with widespread popularity in the country. After being pressed for some hours, the fresh Caşis placed into wooden barrels to ferment and is then minced, kneaded and salted. The mass is then molded into a thin cylindrical fir tree bark case or in a pig bladder. Branza has balsamic aromas, notes of resin and a spicy kick that develops with aging.

Production area Bran, Moeciu and Fundata, Brasov county
Coordinator Marian Popoiu
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Serbia
Stara Planina Belo Sirene Producers

8

In the Stara Planina mountains, a group of farmers is working to preserve the ancient Balkan breeds: Karakachan sheep, Busa cattle and Balkan goats and donkeys. The white, feta-like cheese made in the highlands near the Bulgarian border reflects all the rich variety of the mountain meadows.

Production area Dimitrovgrad municipality
Coordinator Sergej Ivanov
tel. +381 694612071 – stadodoo@gmail.com

Jams and Preserves

The wealth of diversity in the region's unspoiled forests and meadows, plus centuries of history of fruit-growing, have made the Balkans a true treasure trove of jams, compotes and preserves. From recipes of Turkish origin (like Bosnian slatko or Albanian gljko) to those from Saxon tradition (like the Transylvanian preserves), they offer an original way to discover the riches of the Balkans.

Help us protect the rural landscape of the Balkans!

Albania
Raki and the Përmet Gliko Presidium

9

Përmet is a region in Albania, close to the border with Greece and what was the Italian-Greek front line during the Second World War. It is here that Gliko is produced: a preserve similar to Slatko from Bosnia and Macedonia. It is composed of whole fruit, obtained by macerating fruit in water and lime, followed by a subsequent slow cooking. The ingredients are diverse: from green walnuts with prunes to watermelon skins. The region is also known for the production of raki (a spirit made with mulberry, plum or dogwood) and wines, especially white ones from the Debina grape variety.

Production area Përmet
Coordinator Nikolla Vasillaq
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Bosnia-Herzegovina
Pozegaca Plum Slatko

10

Throughout Bosnia and in parts of Serbia, women traditionally prepare this local conserve called slatko (meaning "sweet") for home consumption. To make slatko, plums of the local Pozegaca variety are blanched, peeled and pitted by hand, and left to soak briefly in a solution of water and lime, which keeps them firm during cooking. The plums are then cooked in a syrup of water and sugar and packed in jars.

Production area Drina River Valley, Ustikolina, Gorazde Municipality
Coordinator Jasmina Sahovic
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Bulgaria
Kurtovo Konare Pink Tomato Growers

11

Kurtovo Konare is a pretty village on the banks of the River Vacha, a few kilometres from Plovdiv. An unusual tomato variety has been grown in local kitchen gardens since the 19th century. Large and pink, it was recently added to the Ark of Taste. With its smooth, thin skin and juicy, sweet pulp, the pink tomato is particularly valued as an ingredient in lyutenitsa, a typical Bulgarian preserve based on peppers, tomatoes and spices.

Production area Kurtovo Konare, Plovdiv district
Coordinator Dessislava Dimitrova
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Croatia
Dubrovnik Bitter Orange Marmalade Producers

12

Bitter oranges have been cultivated in Dubrovnik, in southern Dalmatia, for centuries.
Every garden has at least one tree of this native variety, which uses no chemical treatments.
A group of women has decided to turn their bitter orange marmalade production into a small business, and they have joined together in a cooperative. For the last three years, February 2 has been designated "Bitter Orange Day," a day for celebrating local traditions.

Production area Dubrovnik
Coordinator Ivo Kara-Pesic
tel. +385 959295764 – kinookus@gmail.com

Macedonia
Wild Figs Slatko

13

On the banks of Lake Dojran, along the Greek border, the production of slatko (meaning "sweet" in Macedonian) from wild figs is an ancient tradition. It is mainly women who continue to use the traditional recipe for transforming an otherwise inedible fruit into a consumable product, which involves boiling the fruit nine times. Only then do the wild figs release their sugar, after which they are immersed in agda, a syrup of water and sugar, and cooked for another hour. Lemon is added to the resulting slatko to maintain the fig color. It is finally cooled and put into jars.

Production area Dojran, Bogdanci, Valandovo and Gevgelja villages
Coordinator Nada Karaivanova
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Romania
Saxon Village Preserve

14

The region of Siebenburgen in Transylvania is a little slice of the Middle Ages. Made up of seven villages founded by the Saxons eight centuries ago, today it is home to Romanians, Saxons, Hungarians and Roma. Here, following the ancient tradition in these villages, a number homemade jams are produced with garden fruit or wild berries collected in the pristine forest surroundings. Until now, these jams have been made exclusively for domestic consumption, but the Presidium is working to turn them a new source of income.

Production area Saxon villages of Transylvania
Coordinator Jim Turnbull
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Serbia
Leskovac Ajvar Producers

15

In rural areas throughout the western Balkans, the end of September is the time for making ajvar, an unusual preserve of peppers, eggplant, onions, chilis and garlic. If made properly, it keeps for years. Ajvar preparation is a laborious process. The vegetables are first roasted for a long time in the oven then cooled slowly so that the seeds and skin can be removed by hand. Leskovac, in the heart of Serbia, is renowned for the quality of its meat, particularly a type of hamburger called pljeskavica. An unusual variation of ajvar is made here from peppers, oil, vinegar and garlic.

Production area Leskovac
Coordinator Dragana tar – dragana.tar@seedev.org

Medicinal Herbs and Seasonings

Women are the most important guardians of biodiversity, and it is thanks to them that an unparalleled knowledge of aromatic and medicinal herbs is still preserved in many Balkan communities The only way to really discover this region's gastronomy is to be invited into a home, where you can sample ancestral recipes and typical products that cannot be found elsewhere.

Help us to promote rural communities in the Balkans!

Bulgaria
Kyustendil Medicinal Herb Gatherers

16

A fertile plateau with a mild climate extends across the Konoyovo Mountains, not far from the Macedonian border. The plateau is historically known for fruit growing, and the local people have been cultivating apples, pears and dozens of cherry varieties here for centuries. Following Bulgarian tradition, in their free time the local families collect wild culinary and medicinal herbs, which are commonly used in the traditional cuisine. The 30-plus varieties include mashterka (Thymus serpyllum), chubritsa (savory) and sminduh (fenugreek), used to prepare curative infusions, season dishes and decorate the table.

Production area Kyustendil, western Bulgaria
Coordinator Casey Angelova
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Croatia
Ljubitovica Šarac Garlic Presidium

17

In the village of Ljubitovica, just a few kilometers from the city of Trogir, life seems to have stood still for centuries. The village is home to a special garlic famed throughout the region. Known as *luk* in Croatian and *cesnjak* in Dalmatian, the Allium sativum garlic variety is conservable, full-flavored and fragrant, often streaked with reddish veins. Grown by local families to supplement their incomes, after harvesting it is woven into strings and sold mainly by women at markets in Split, Trogir and Sibenik, or to tourists traveling the coastal roads in summer.

Production area Ljubitovica, Split-Dalmatia region
Coordinator Zorka Turkovic
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Croatia
Unije Island Gatherers

18

Unije is one of the westernmost islands of the Croatian archipelago in the northern Adriatic. The small peninsula of Polje extends to the southwest, with fertile soil and a source of drinkable water, while the rest of the hilly limestone island is covered by shrubby Mediterranean vegetation. No motor vehicles are allowed on the island. The community is made up of around 20 producers, farmers, fishers and food producers, working to safeguard and promote the island's natural resources, especially the pristine maquis, vast expanses of juniper, sage, rosemary and thyme.

Production area Unije Island
Coordinator Robert Nikolić
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Macedonia
Bukovo Red Peppers Presidium

19

Peppers are central to Balkan gastronomy, featuring in almost every meal. In September, the markets are filled with dozens of varieties of widely varying colors and forms. Each of which has a distinct use. Bukovo, a small village a few kilometers from Bitola in southern Macedonia, is famous for producing the best pepper seasoning, used to flavor soups and meat dishes. Grown from self-produced seeds, the Bukovo pepper is harvested and then tied into long wreathes to be dried in the sun and then ovens. When the peppers are ready, they are ground in traditional wooden mortars called *kutle* to obtain a coarse mix which is sieved. Intense ruby red in color, it is sweet, aromatic and slightly spicy with a long and pleasant finish.

Production area Bukovo, Bitola municipality
Coordinator Elena Karovska
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Romania
Brusturoasa Palanca Medicinal Herb Gatherers

20

The municipalities of Brusturoasa and Palanca, in Bacau county, are dotted with enchanting little villages set in an unspoiled landscape. Especially in the spring, the women and children gather wild herbs, which have various medicinal uses. Most of the herbs are dried and stored, ready to be made into tinctures, creams, teas or other beverages. The members of the Brusturoasa Palanca Convivium, aware of the value of these medicinal herbs, have started promoting and protecting the traditional knowledge, involving children from local schools and the elderly. They are putting together an archive of all the different plant species and varieties, listing the uses for each one.

Production area Brusturoasa Palanca
Coordinator Camelia Zamfir
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Serbia
Raška Gentian Growers

21

Though only a stone's throw from the Kopaonik ski runs, the mountain communities in this part of southern Serbia do not benefit from the influx of winter tourists. Instead, Sveto Kalabic is trying to revive the local rural economy by involving some of the local producers in the cultivation of gentian, whose roots are used to make medicinal infusions and extracts. Gentian is hard to grow, requiring silicate-rich soil and high altitudes, and has a very long productive cycle: the first crop can be harvested only after five years.

Production area Mountainous areas in the municipality of Raška, southern Serbia
Coordinator Sveto Kalabic
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Spirits and Wine

Rakı in Turkey, raki in Albania, rakija in Slavic countries: From deepest Anatolia to the Dalmatian islands, all across the region this quintessential spirit is given a similar name.
No one in the Balkans buys it at the supermarket. Instead, everyone has a trusted supplier, a friend or a relative living in the countryside. Rakı/raki/rakija is the ultimate symbol of conviviality, and represents a way of consumption based on direct knowledge of the producer and the product's true value.

Help us promote a short supply chain!

Bosnia-Herzegovina
Stolac Winemakers

22

Herzegovina is directly influenced by the Adriatic Sea and enjoys a relatively dry and sunny climate. This typically Mediterranean weather means that viticulture has been practiced here for centuries. Some of the region's best wines come from the native grape varieties žilavka and blatina. Blatina, from the Dubrave plateau, makes an alcoholic, intensely ruby-red wine, while žilavka is a white grape from around Mostar. Its wines are pale, straw-yellow with greenish tinges, with an intense, characteristic aroma and a fragrant flavor. Thanks to the support of Oxfam Italia and the contribution of Cooperazione Italiana, a cooperative winery has been founded in Stolac, and over the last two years the project has supported the planting or reconstructing of 15 hectares of vineyards in the areas around Stolac, Buna and Bjelo Polje. Many of the new plantings replace old vineyards that were destroyed or abandoned during the war in the 1990s.

Production area Stolac
Coordinator Ajna Galicic
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Bulgaria
Pelin Wine Producers

23

The village of Osmar, in northeastern Bulgaria, is famous for Pelin wine, initially produced in small quantities by individual families in the village. After nationalization in the first half of the 20th century, its production was centrally controlled. Traditionally the wine is flavored with fruit, spices and herbs (including wormwood, with its unmistakable strong flavor), but there is no set recipe. Every producer has their own personal formula, though the wine is always aged for a year in barrels.

Production area Osmar, Preslav, Bulgaria
Coordinator Dessislava Dimitrova
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Croatia
Pelješac Plavac Mali and Rakija Producers

24

For centuries, the peninsula of Pelješac, in southern Dalmatia, has been renowned for its red wines made from plavac mali grapes. This variety is grown on the peninsula's rugged karst hills, just a few steps from the sea, and wild herbs grow around the vines. These surroundings give the wine unique aromatic notes, famous around the world. Sadly, the wine's fame has led to arrival of industrial, standardized viticulture, driven solely by profit and with little connection to the local area. A few years ago, a small group of local producers decided to commit to traditional, environmentally friendly viticulture, in order to give consumers a taste of the real flavor of this unique wine. The same producers also distil rakija from the pips and skin of plavac mali grapes, a little-known product with great potential.

Production area Pelješac peninsula
Coordinator Denis Marusic
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Macedonia
Kavadarci Z'ta Rakija Producers

25

Tikvesh is one of the areas best suited to grape growing in all of Macedonia, and its wines are inspiring great interest among connoisseurs. Lesser known but equally interesting, z'ta rakija is a traditional brandy, made from selected grapes of excellent quality fermented between November and January. After aging in oak barrels, this brandy takes on its typical dark color and acquires an unusual flavor and fragrance. Many small-scale producers in Tikvesh, including z'ta rakija producers, helped by the members of the local Slow Food convivium, are working to set up an Earth Market with z'ta rakija as its symbol.

Production area Tikvesh
Coordinator Goran Dimitrov
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Serbia
Gledić Crvena Ranka Plum Rakija Presidium

26

Rakija (plum brandy) is the alcoholic beverage of choice throughout the Balkans. No region, village or household can be found without a bottle ready to welcome guests, drink at meals or mark the rhythm of days and seasons. But not all rakijas are equal. In the gentle mountain range of Gledić in central Serbia, an antique variety of plum known as Cervena Ranka (literally: early red plums) is cultivated. These plums are particularly suited to the production of rakija. This plum combined with the ancient knowledge of the local distillers becomes a unique liquor, with a pale yellow color and a clean, profound taste.

Production area Gledić, Ibar valley
Coordinator Dragana Veljovic
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Romania
Turda Farmers' Market

27

Turda and the surrounding villages are located on the fertile Aries plain, where the Transylvanian plateau meets the Apuseni Mountains. The region is known for honey, low-sugar fruit and flower jams, smoked meats, pickles and cheese. On the third Saturday of every month, the Slow Food Turda Convivium organizes a market in the center of town, where 20 small-scale local producers can sell their seasonal products. Many of the producers sell their own palinca, a brandy made in tiny quantities from the double distillation of different types of fruit, most commonly plums.

Production area Turda, Cluj county
Coordinator Marta Pozsonyi
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the paths of Balkan food biodiversity

A crossroads of peoples, cultures and religions, the Balkans are home to unique gastronomic traditions. Though still preserved today, they risk disappearing, suffocated by the lethal embrace of a globalization that considers traditional knowledge an irrelevant legacy of the past.

Slow Food, through the region's Presidia and food communities, is proposing four paths: Mountain Cheeses, Jams and Preserves, Medicinal Herbs and Seasoning, Spirits and Wine, that represent the biodiversity of the Balkans.

www.slowfood.com
www.terramadre.org
www.slowfoodfoundation.org
www.essedra.com

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© Archivio Slow Food, Kunal Chandra, Ivo Danchev, Francesco Martino, Oliver Migliore, Alessia Paschetta, Alberto Peroli, Francesco Sottile
Printing
Litostampa Mario Astegiano – Marene (Italy)

This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

This project is funded by the European Union

the paths of Balkan food biodiversity

Slow Food is an international association founded in 1989 to recognize the importance of pleasure connected to food through the discovery of producers' knowledge, awareness of diversity (places, recipes, flavors) and respect for the territory, the environment and the seasons.

Slow Food currently has over 100,000 members in 150 countries around the world. The network of members is organized into convivia, local groups coordinated by a convivium leader. They organize community events—courses, tastings, educational activities, dinners, trips—and promote the movement's international campaigns at a local level.

> Find out more about Slow Food's activities: www.slowfood.com

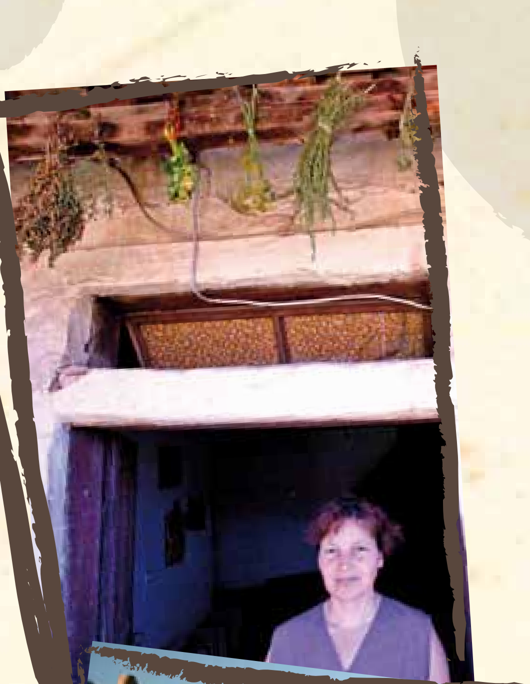
join us!

Become part of the global Slow Food network

> Find out how at www.slowfood.com

The **ESSEDRA** project is co-funded by the European Commission as part of the "Civil Society Facility" program of DG Enlargement, the objective of which is to strengthen civil society organizations in the western Balkans and Turkey. In this context, Slow Food has established a network of NGOs in the region to support rural communities and ensure the preservation of biodiversity. Activities include projects to support small-scale producers and advocacy at the national and European level, as well as communication activities aimed at the public and media. Such an objective cannot be separated from addressing issues such as agriculture, the protection of the environment and landscapes, climate change and the well-being of local communities.

> Learn more about the project's activities: www.essedra.com



To safeguard food biodiversity, strengthen local communities and promote a more sustainable model for agriculture, the **Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity** coordinates and publicizes Slow Food projects that support small-scale food producers: the Presidia, the Thousand Gardens in Africa, the Earth Markets and the Ark of Taste.

> Find out more about the Slow Food Foundation and its projects: www.slowfoodfoundation.org

The **Presidia** are concrete and virtuous examples of sustainable agriculture, based on quality, animal welfare, sustainability, connection to a local area and consumer health and pleasure. There are over 400 around the world, and they involve communities of producers who are willing to work together, drawing up production rules and deciding how to promote their product. The aim of the Presidia is to save native breeds, plant varieties and quality artisanal products at risk of disappearing, to strengthen producer organization, to promote areas of origin, to preserve traditional techniques and knowledge and to add value to sustainable practices.

> See the complete list of Slow Food Presidia: www.slowfoodfoundation.org

Food communities are groups of people who sustainably produce, process and distribute quality food and have close historical, social or cultural links to a geographic area. They can be involved in a range of different activities, from fishing to farming, farmers' markets to beekeeping.

> See the food communities in your area: www.terramadre.org

The **Ark of Taste** is a project of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity to catalogue foods at risk of extinction.
With many products now boarded on to the Ark, it is an extraordinary heritage of fruits, vegetables, animal breeds, cheeses, breads, sweets and cured meats. Slow Food is primarily concerned with the people who grow, raise and process the products, including their knowledge and their territories. To date, over 150 products from the Balkans and Turkey have been registered on the Ark.

> Anyone can nominate a product for the Ark of Taste. Find out how: www.slowfoodfoundation.com/ark

Terra Madre Balkans is the network of all the food communities and Slow Food projects in the Balkan Peninsula. Since 2009, Terra Madre Balkans has been fighting to save the gastronomic traditions and food biodiversity of one of Europe's most fascinating and least-known regions.

Within the Balkan countries, **Slow Food** and the Terra Madre network counts over **1,500 members, 16 Slow Food Presidia, 80 food communities,** 15 food and taste education programs in schools and 26 chefs. All of the network's members understand that safeguarding their gastronomic heritage requires an urgent and shared effort that goes beyond national borders.

The Terra Madre network meets every two years, but its energy is mostly deployed in small initiatives around the region: knowledge exchanges between Bosnian and Macedonian producers, training workshops in Romania for students from different countries, campaigns to protect the landscape and the rights of small-scale farmers, village festivals celebrating the best of local cuisine. All this is Terra Madre Balkans.

"We cannot think about changing the food world without trying to understand what's happening at our door. The Balkans are part of us and of Europe. We are facing an epochal challenge: either we promote a new model of development or we resign ourselves to the disappearance of an ancient, wiser world."

Carlo Petrini
president of Slow Food International

Support the Terra Madre Balkans network!

Donate via bank transfer

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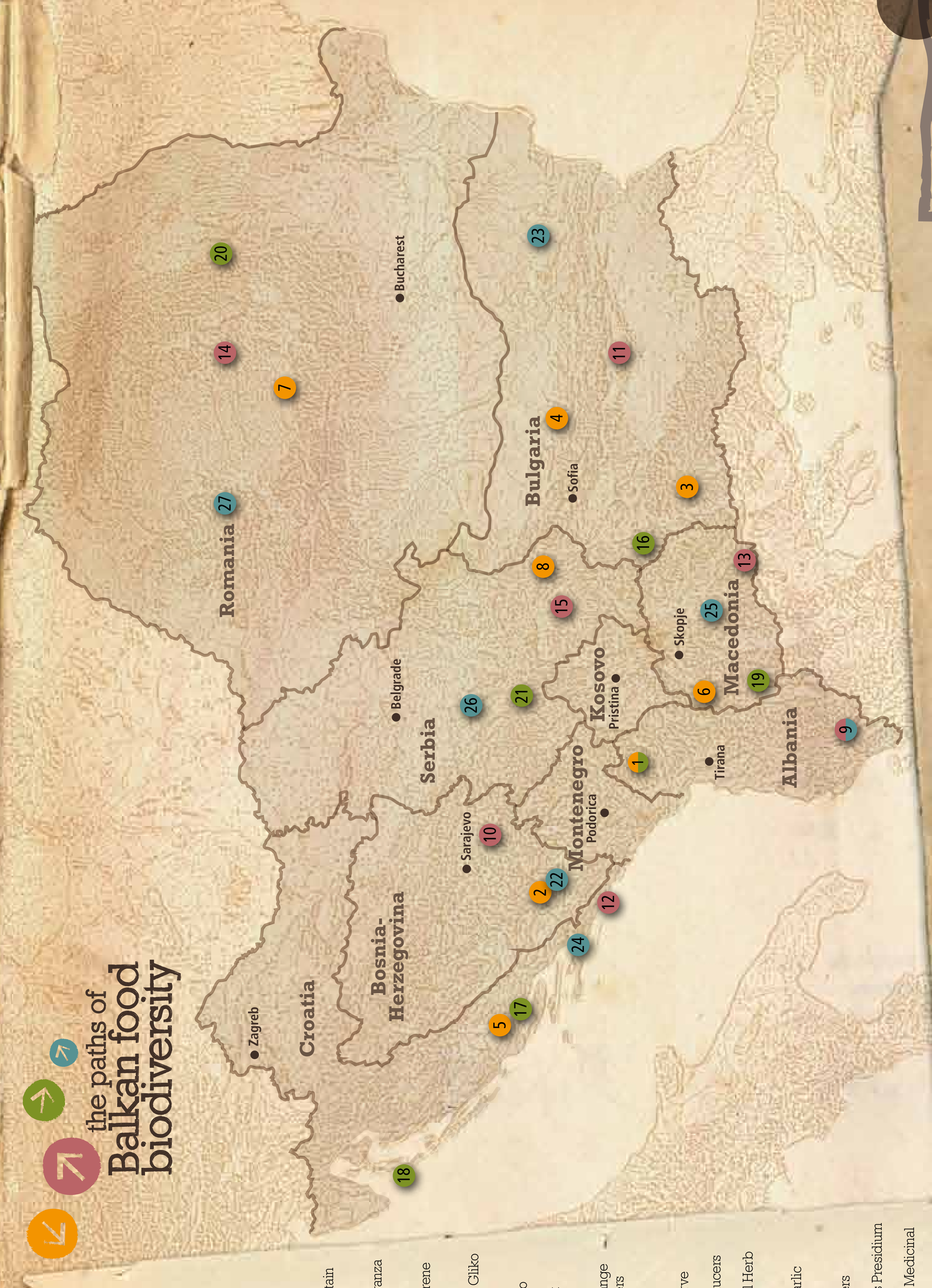
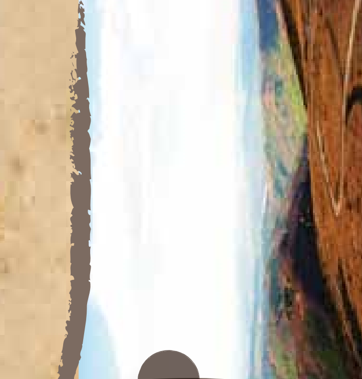


the paths of Balkan food biodiversity

Legend

1. Lepushe Mishavin cheese and Çai Malit tea
2. Cheese in a Sack
3. Karakachan Sheep
4. Tcherni Vit Green Cheese
5. Škripavac cheese producers
6. Mavrovo Reka Mountain Pasture Cheeses
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